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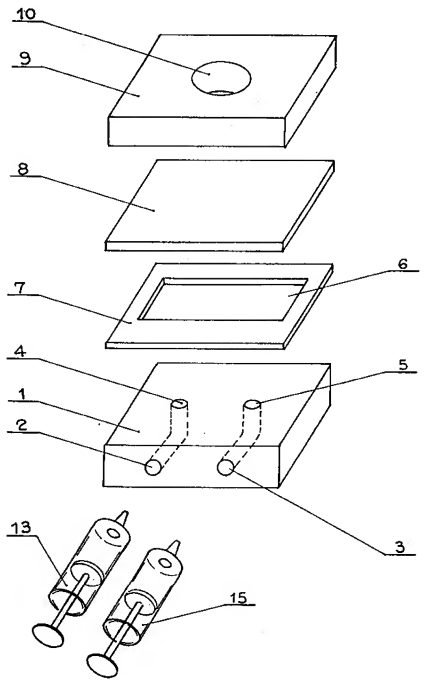
(54) A flow cell device for the monitoring of blood or any other cell suspension.

(57) A flow-cell device for the monitoring of blood or any other cell suspension under flow comprising: a rigid transparent base having a pair of holes with inlets and outlets, one hole for transferring the cell suspension from a supplying means to a flow channel and the other hole for transferring the tested suspension back from the flow channel to a receiving means, a flow-channel plate sandwiched between the base and a transparent plate wherein the flow channel is a wide opening in the middle of the flow-channel plate, said flow-channel plate can be an integral part of either the base or the transparent plate, a transparent plate covering the flow-channel plate, a rigid cover covering the transparent plate with a hole enabling a microscope objective to approach the flow-channel plate, the transparent plate and the cover being attached to each other firmly by any conventional means or the transparent plate being an integral part of the cover.

FIG. 1



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FIELD OF THE INVENTION.

This invention relates to a flow cell device for the monitoring of blood or any cells suspension under flow. More specifically, the object of the present invention is to easily monitor the cells - particularly red blood cells - and their dynamic organization under flow conditions, as well as their shape and deformability ,using small samples of suspensions, with a safe and cost effective procedure. The flow of blood or other cells suspension in the abovementioned flow cell is visualized through a microscope. The supplying and receiving of the suspension sample to and from the flow cell is by means of syringes or any other appropriate device. This invention may be used in a system connected to a video camera, computer and image monitor (Computerized image analyzer system).

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION.

Red blood cells at rest (stasis) forms aggregates, which are disaggregated gradually with increasing blood flow. The degree of aggregation and the aggregate structure reflect a delicate balance between chemical and hydrodynamic forces. In stasis, when flow forces are absent, the interaction between the cell membrane and plasma proteins will cause the red cells to aggregate into stacks called rouleaux, which further interact to form networks. Cell aggregation is a reversible process and the blood therefore follows dynamic changes according to flow conditions. The aggregability of red blood cells (hereinafter called RBC), which is a major determinant in blood circulation, strongly depends on the cells physical and chemical properties, and is very sensitive to changes in these properties. The size and number of red blood cell aggregates dominate the blood viscosity which plays a central role in blood flow in vessels of constant diameter. Thus the blood flow to tissues is largely affected by the aggregability of the RBC. The tendency of RBCs to form aggregates and thrombi under flow is a structural property of dynamic origin which is closely associated with the risk of diminished blood supply and the plugging of small blood vessels, pathologies which are important factors in stroke, shock, and damage caused to organs by various vascular diseases. The aggregation and disaggregation of RBC play a centeral role in blood flow, especially in microvessels and in states of lowered blood flow. Increased RBC aggregability occurs in many disease states (e.g. coronary heart diseases, diabetes, hyperviscosity syndrome, thrombosis, trauma and sickle cell anemia), and is considered to be a risk factor. Recent application of video microscopes enables a glimpse into this complicated type of flow. However, quantitative information about RBC organization under flow is still minimal, in spite of its great clinical significance.

Another important prperty of cells, particularly of blood cells, is their deformability, i.e. their ability to change shape and thus to pass through small blood vessels. Variations in the blood cells deformability contribute to various cardiovascular and microcirculatory disorders.

The present invention enables the visualization of RBC in a flow cell and analysis of the aggregability size and deformability under varying flow conditions. The width of the flow cell is such that it enables a single layer of aggregates to pass through the cell, and provides a two dimensional array of the structures. The form of the cross section and the flow channel is important for generating flow gradients which are the origin of these disaggregating forces. This invention therefore might be a novel and powerful tool for real-time monitoring of cell-to-cell interaction which is altered in pathological states and affected by drugs. This system enables to study the dynamic organization of cells suspensions; including flow related properties of such cells, such as cell deformability and shape, as well as the interaction between a cell or aggregate with the blood vessel wall, thus adding a new dimension to existing blood tests, and enriching the knowledge of blood rheology (the science of blood flow).

The creation of flowing two dimensional aggregate layer requires a narrow gap. This imposes a practical problem of cleaning the flow cell and the tubing, that involves in the flow after each test. The problem becomes severe in case of automatic testing in a commercial product that should withstand safty regulations.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION.

The present invention relates to a disposable flow cell device for the monitoring of the behavior of blood or any other cells suspension under flow, particularly suspensions of red blood cells. The above mentioned flow cell is comprised of a rigid transparent base, having a pair of holes with inlets and outlets. One hole for transferring the blood from a supplying means to a flow channel, and the other hole for transferring the tested blood back from the flow channel to a receiving means. However, the role of the "supplier" and the "receiver" could be changed intermittently. The flow channel plate is located between the base and a transparent plate covering the flow channel plate, wherein the flow channel is a wide hole (of varying shape and size) in the middle of the flow channel plate. A rigid cover covers the transparent plate, with a hole enabling a microscope objective to approach the

flow channel plate. The base, flow channel plate, transparent plate and cover of the flow cell may be attached to each other by glue or screws, or the said flow channel plate may be an integral part of either the base or the transparent plate in one peice, or the cover, the transparent base and flow channel plate can all be one peice. The method supplying and receiving of the suspension sample to and from the flow cell is by means of syringes, flexible caps, bellow, or any other appropriate device, inserted to the inlet and outlet of the base respectively. The above mentioned flow cell may be used in a system in which a video camera is mechanically connected to the microscope, and a computer and an image monitor connected to each other can be connected to the microscope.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION.

The figures illustrate the preffered embodiment of the present invention; Variations of several of the components are possible.

Figure 1 illustrates an isometric view of the seperate components of the flow cell.

Figures 2(a) 2(b) and 2(c) illustrates flow channels of different types.

Figure 3 illustrates a cross section of the supplying syringe and the receiving syringe .

Figure 4 illustrates a cross section of bellows (18) (an alternative supplying and receiving means) inserted in the inlet and outlet of the rigid base.

Figure 5 shows a schematic diagram of a the computerized image analyzer system using the flow cell according to this invention.

The flow cell device according to the present invention is comprised of several components which are illustrated in figure 1: A rigid transparent base (1) which contains an inlet (2) and an outlet (3) for transferring the cell suspension to the actual flow channel (6) through openings (4) and (5). These holes also form reservoirs for the tested sample. The flow channel (6), is formed by a hole in the channel flow plate (7), which is sandwiched between the base under it (1), and a transparent plate (8) above. A rigid cover (9) with a hole (10) enables the microscope objective to approach the flow channel (6). The rigidity of the cover (9) and the base (1) assure that the flow channel width will not be affected by the pressure applied. The base (1), flow channel plate (7), transparent plate (8) and cover (9) can be attached to each other firmly by using bond, screws or by other methods, or the the flow channel plate (7) can be an integral part (one piece) of either the base (1) or the transparent plate (8), or the cover (9), the transparent plate (8) and the flow channel plate (7) can be one piece, attached to the other parts by methods to be decided upon following engineering considerations. The preferred embodiment of this invention comprises a rectangular flow channel 20-40 microns high (comparable to the diameter of arterial microvessels- enough to enable the flow of aggregates but thin enough to produce a two dimensional layer of such aggregates.)

Figure 2 describes possible shapes of the flow channel: Different types of flow can be produced by giving the flow channel a non-constant width (11) (speed varies along the channel), or by using a flow channel with a trapezoidal cross section (12), which leads to a flow with velocity gradients vertically to the flow direction. These flow patterns are important and known to occur in vivo.

Figure 3 represents a cross section of the supplying and receiving means. The supplying syringe (13) (which is used to take the sample) is fixed firmly inside the inlet hole (2), at its conic opening (14). An initially empty (15) syringe is attached to the outlet hole (3) at a similar opening (16). The invention is used by the following method: After syringe (13) is attached to the flow cell, the piston of the "inlet" syringe (13) is pushed, while that of the "outlet" syringe is pulled with the same force by a simple mechanical arrangement, which is not part of the patent application. After the reservoir (4) is filled with the cell suspension a flow can be developed in a repeatable way by switching between the pushing and pulling operation. By controlling the piston velocity the flow can be controlled. All the filling procedure and flow control can be done automatically.

Figure 4 demonstrates alternatives to the syringes (13,15). Flexible cap or bellows (17), could be used, which could change the cell volume with minimal pressure, and enable to inject blood through its top using a needle while keeping the cell leak proof.

Figure 5 illustrates a system in which the present invention can be used. The microscope (19) approaching the said flow cell is mechanically connected to a video camera (20), connected to a computer (21) and image analyzer (22). A pump (23) can be connected to the computer as another alternative supplying and receiving means.

Claims

1. A flow-cell device for monitoring of blood or any other cell suspension under flow comprising:

   a rigid transparent base (1) with a pair of holes which serve as inlets (2) and outlets (3), one hole for transferring a cell suspension from a supplying means to a flow channel (6) and the other hole for transferring a tested suspension from the flow channel (6) back to a receiv-

ing means,

a flow-channel plate (7), sandwiched between said base (1) and a transparent plate (8), wherein a wide opening in the middle of the flow-channel plate (7) serves as a flow channel, which flow-channel plate (7) can be an integral part with either the base (1) or the transparent plate (8), the transparent plate (8) covering the flow-channel plate (7), and

a rigid cover (9) for the transparent plate (8) which cover (9) has a hole (10) so that a microscope objective can approach the flow-channel plate (7),

wherein either the transparent plate (8) and the cover (9) are firmly attached to each other by any conventional means or the transparent plate (8) is an integral part of the cover (9).

2. A flow-cell device according to claim 1, wherein the height of the flow-channel plate (7) is 20 to 40 μm.

3. A flow-cell device according to claim 1 or claim 2, wherein the width and/or the height of the flow-channel plate (7) is/are constant.

4. A flow-cell device according to any of claims 1 to 3, wherein the flow-channel plate (7) has any polygonal cross section, preferably a constant cross section.

5. A flow-cell device according to claim 1 or claim 2, wherein the flow-channel plate (7) has a variable cross section, preferably a non-constant width.

6. A flow-cell device according to any of claims 1 to 5, wherein the opening within the flow-channel plate (7) is rectangular or trapezoidal.

7. A flow-cell device according to any of claims 1 to 6 wherein the base (1), the flow-channel plate (7), the transparent plate (8) and the cover (9) are attached to each other by an adhesive or with screws.

8. A flow-cell device according to any of claims 1 to 7, wherein the suspension supplying and receiving means (13, 17) are syringes, flexible caps or bellows.

9. A flow-cell device according to any of claims 1 to 8, which is disposable.

10. A flow-cell device according to any of claims 1 to 9 for use in the detection of aggregation and disaggregation, cell deformability and shape, and cell-wall, cell-to-cell, and cell-to-extracellular-matrix interaction of blood cells or any cell suspension.

11. A method for monitoring the behaviour of cell suspensions under flow by using a flow-cell device according to any of the claims 1 to 10, comprising the steps of:

fixing a syringe (13) with a cell suspension to be tested to an inlet hole (2) of a rigid transparent base (1),

fixing an empty syringe (15) to an outlet hole (3) of the said base (1),

pushing the piston of the syringe (13) with the cell suspension and simultaneously pulling the piston of the empty syringe (15).

12. A method according to claim 15, wherein a prolonged detection of cell suspension under flow is obtained by repeatedly reversing the roles of the receiving and supplying means.

13. A method according to claims 11 and 12, wherein flexible caps or bellows are used instead of the syringes.

14. An image analyzer system, using a flow-cell device as claimed in any of claims 1 to 10, for the detection and visualization of suspension cells under flow, which system comprises:-

a microscope that can approach the flow channel through a hole (10) in the cover (9) of the flow cell,

a video camera mechanically connected to said microscope, a computer and image monitor both connected to each other and to the video camera and

a pump force or generator, that operates said syringes or flexible caps or bellows in a stationary or non-stationary way, connected to the computer and to the flow-cell inlets pushing the suspension back and forth in the flow cell.

FIG. 1

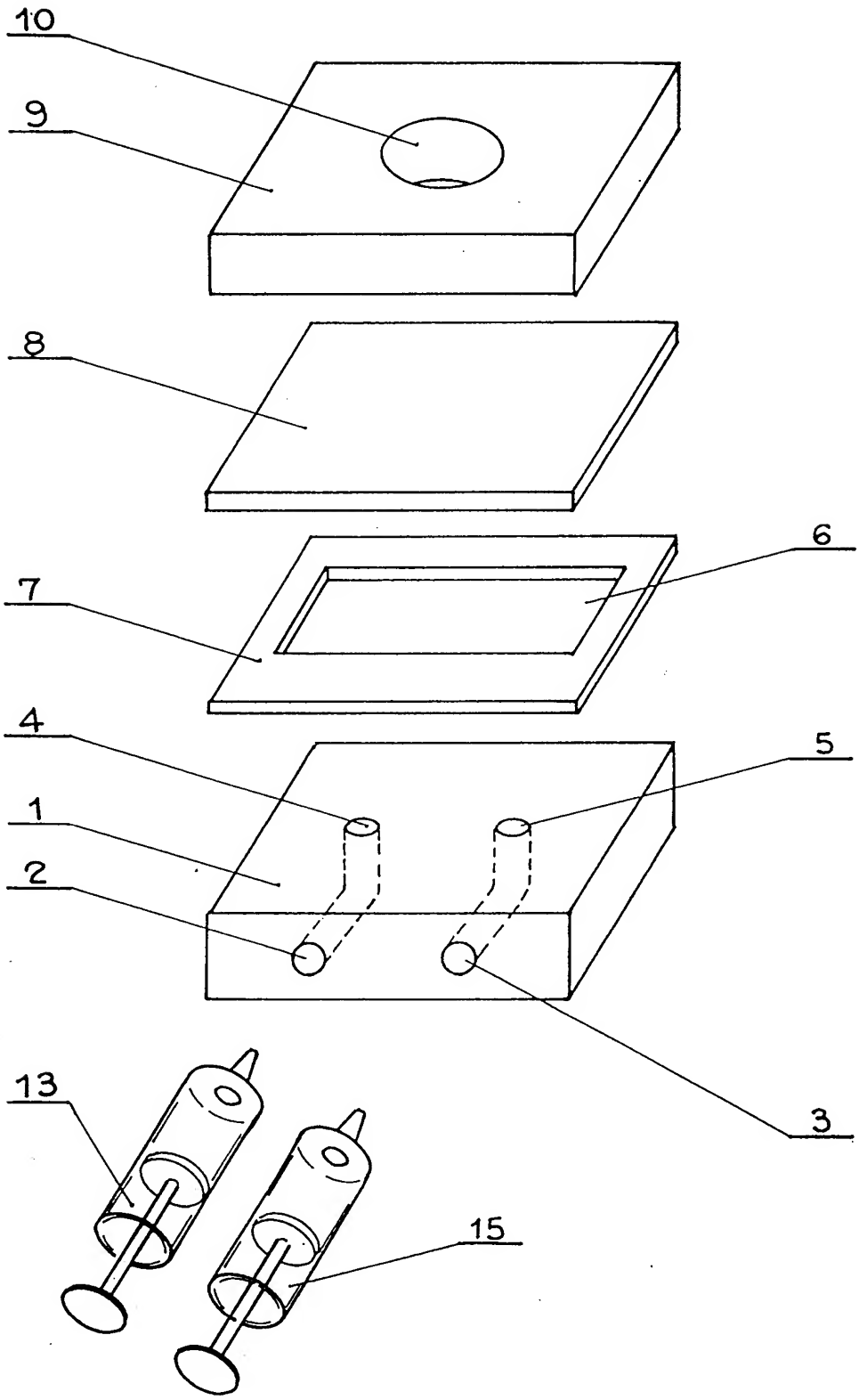


FIG. 2

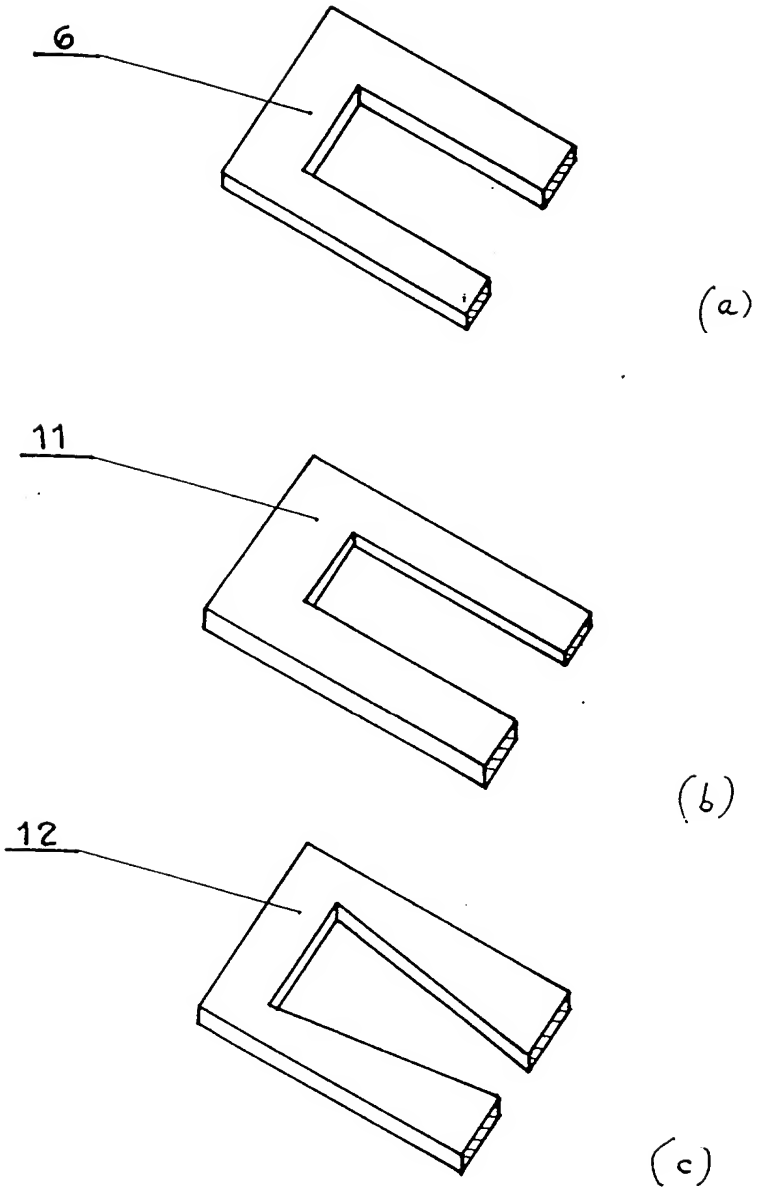


FIG. 3

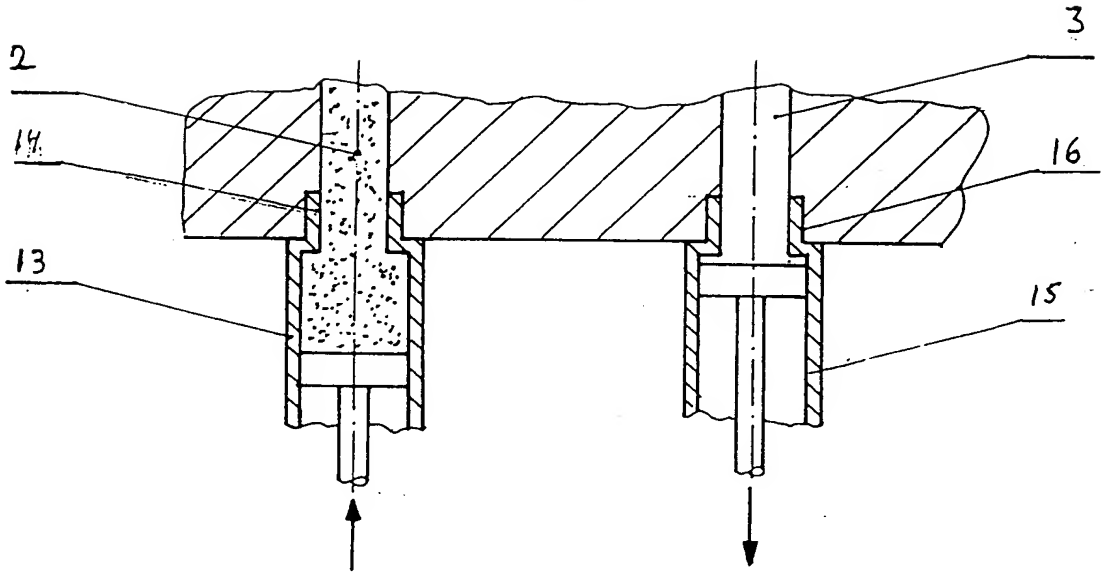
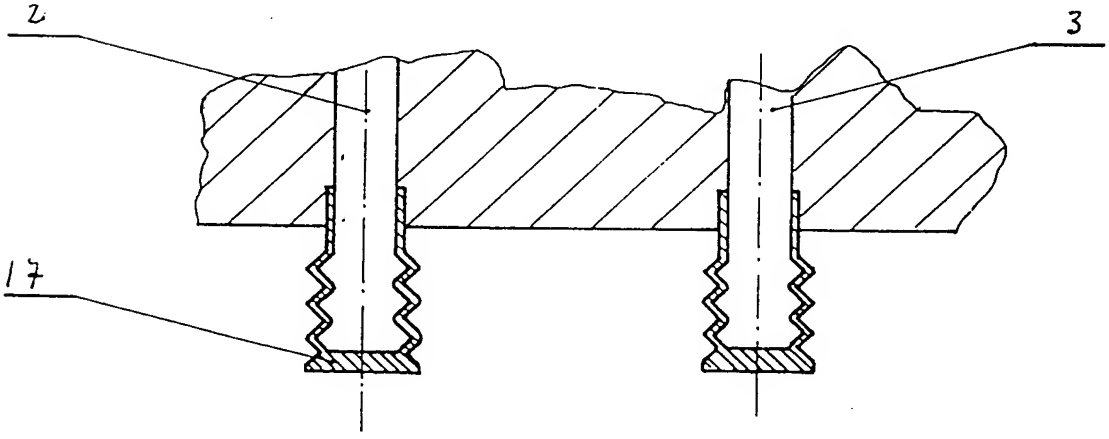


FIG. 4



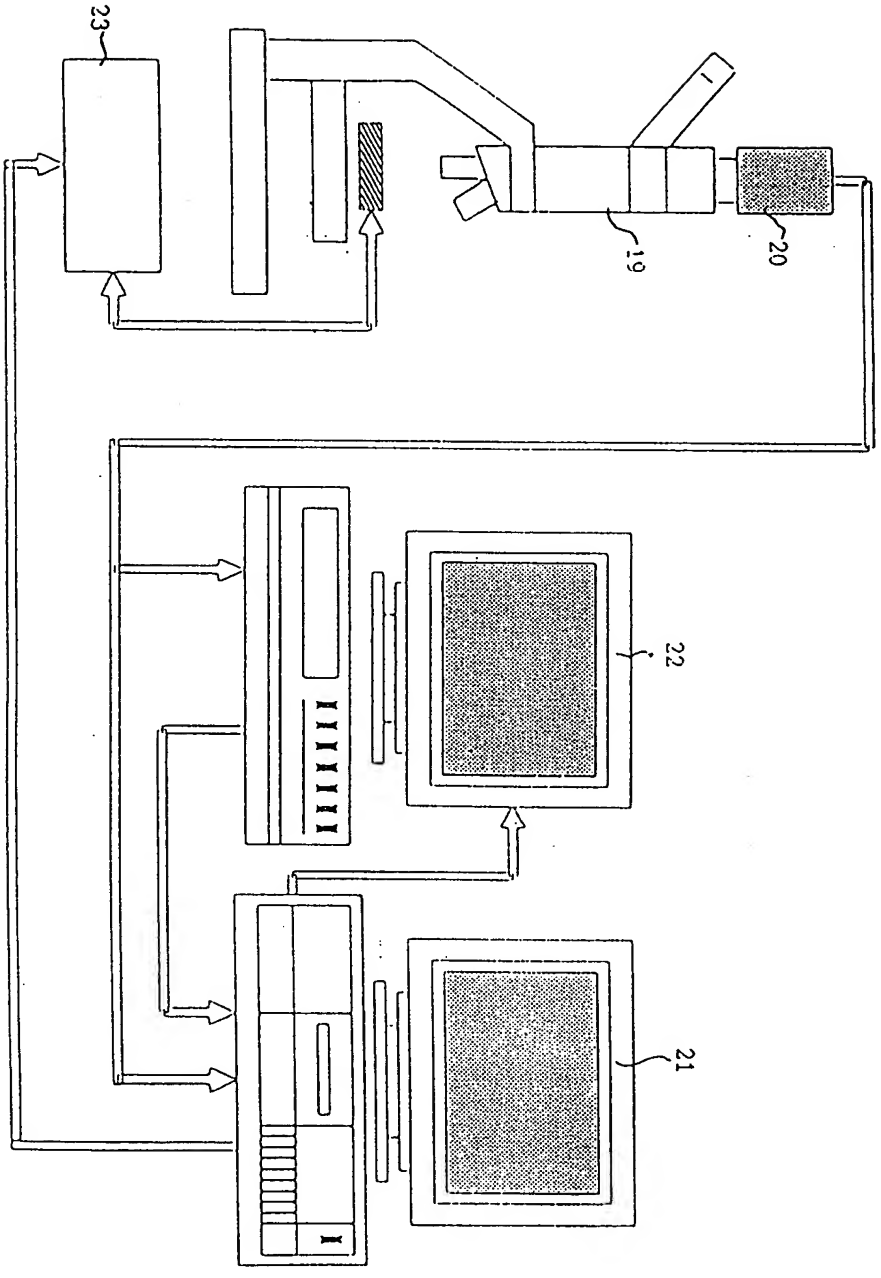


Figure 5

European Patent Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 94 11 2362

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)
X	US-A-3 552 865 (LEUNG ET AL.) * column 2, line 45 - column 3, line 32; figure 1 *	1,3,4,7	G01N21/05
Y		5,9	
P,Y	WO-A-93 21514 (A-VOX SYSTEMS) * page 1, paragraph 2 * * page 5, paragraph 1 - page 6, paragraph 1; figures *	5,9	
A	GB-A-2 071 355 (ACCUSPEC) * page 1, line 3 - line 63; figure 2 *	1,3,4	

TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6)

G01N

The present search report has been drawn up for all claims

Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner
THE HAGUE	18 November 1994	Krametz, E

CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS

X : particularly relevant if taken alone
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